

Ambassador Hartley's IDAHOT Remarks
May 19, 2015

Your Excellencies, members of the LGBT community, Ladies and Gentlemen,

Dober večer.

Thank you so much for joining us this evening to mark the International Day Against Homophobia, Transphobia, and Biphobia.

I would like to thank GLIFAA – Gays and Lesbians in Foreign Affairs Agencies – an American organization that supports our LGBT colleagues wherever they are working – in Washington or overseas. GLIFAA's support, as well as the support of the U.S. Embassy, has allowed me to host you here at my residence.

The issue is simple. Gay rights are human rights. This is the official position of the United States Government.

Protecting the human rights of all people, including LGBT persons, is one of the highest foreign policy priorities of the Obama Administration.

Advancing equality for LGBT persons is a fundamental aspect of promoting democracy and human rights around the world.

It is not only the right thing to do, but it is the practical thing to do: inclusive societies make better institutional partners and better neighbors.

We have come a long way. For decades it seemed that progress on LGBT rights was painfully incremental and that change came very slowly.

The demonstrations that followed the police raid on a gay-friendly bar, the Stonewall Inn, in New York City in 1969, over time, transformed the LGBT rights movement from a fringe effort into a mainstream campaign for tolerance, inclusion, and towards acceptance.

When Harvey Milk was elected in 1977 to San Francisco's city council, he became the first openly gay person to be elected to public office in the United States.

In 1993, the U.S. military instituted the Don't Ask, Don't Tell policy - a controversial compromise between lifting the ban on gays serving openly in the military and maintaining the status quo. But it allowed LGBT people to serve in the military only if they didn't tell anyone they were homosexual. This law was repealed by Congress in 2010.

In 1996 the U.S. Congress passed the Defense of Marriage Act (DOMA). It excluded same-sex couples from being recognized as married under federal law, making them ineligible for federal marriage benefits. The Supreme Court of the United States ruled this law unconstitutional in 2013.

On May 17, 2004, the state of Massachusetts became the first American state to legalize same-sex marriages. Same-sex marriage is now legal in 36 states and the District of Columbia. More than 70% of Americans now live in places where same-sex marriage is legal. Our Supreme Court will rule next month

on whether states without marriage equality may refuse to recognize such marriages in other jurisdictions – potentially creating marriage equality throughout the United States.

In 2012, Tammy Baldwin became the first openly gay Senator in American history, and there are now any number of LGBT individuals serving in elected office at the federal, state and local levels in the United States.

From 1969 to 2015 – 46 years – rapid social change or slow, if steady progress? I guess it depends on your point of view. What I do know is that in the United States, and in many other countries, particularly here in Europe, we have indeed made progress and that the world is a different and a better place than it was nearly five decades ago at the time of Stonewall.

But progress in one country or on a few continents does not mean we are done securing the rights and protections of LGBT individuals. And this starts with protecting children.

Around the world, children and young people who are lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender or intersex, or seen as such, still face stigma, discrimination and violence because of their perceived or actual sexual orientation and gender identity, or because their bodies differ from typical definitions of female or male.

Violence and discrimination against LGBT and intersex children and young persons take place at home, in schools and in institutions. LGBT young people too often face rejection by their families and communities who disapprove of their sexual orientation or gender identity. This can result in high rates of

homelessness, social exclusion, and poverty. LGBT children are often bullied by classmates and teachers, resulting in some students dropping out. They may even be refused school admission or expelled on the basis of their actual or perceived sexual orientation or gender identity. And they may be subjected to cruel and pointless “conversion therapy” that seeks to change their sexual orientation.

States must act to protect all children and young adults from violence, and ensure that effective child protection and support systems are in place, including shelters and other safety mechanisms for those in need of protection.

The United States calls on all countries to comply with their obligation to respect, protect, and fulfill the rights of all children and young adults without discrimination, to ensure that lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex children and young people are consulted and participate in discussions on policies and laws that impact on their rights. We also call on human rights and child rights institutions to fulfil their mandate and play their part in protecting them from violence and discrimination.

Our work is far from done. We will mark IDAHOT today, next year, and into the future to ensure the protection of human rights for members of the LGBT community.

Thank you very much!